



Pakistani Kashmiri militants now fighting NATO forces

Amir Mir

Friday 18 September 2009

LAHORE: The reported death of the ameer of the Azad Kashmir chapter of the Harkatul Jehadul Islami (HUJI) Commander Ilyas Kashmiri in a US drone attack has confirmed that the trouble-stricken Waziristan region has become the new battlefield for the Kashmiri militant groups which are increasingly joining forces with the pro-Taliban elements to fight out the NATO troops from Afghanistan.

International media reports have confirmed while citing US intelligence sources the death of the HUJI leader Ilyas Kashmiri along with Nazimuddin Zalalov alias Yahyo, a top al-Qaeda leader belonging to the Islamic Jihad of Uzbekistan. Both died in two separate drone attacks conducted on September 7 and September 14, 2009 respectively by the Afghanistan-based American drones in the Machikhel and Khushali Toori Khel villages of the Mir Ali sub division of North Waziristan. Ilyas Kashmiri died

after the predator targeted a car carrying five suspected militants in Khushali Toori Khel village.

Ilyas Kashmiri was considered to be one of the most dangerous al-Qaeda-linked Pakistani commanders. No. 4 on the Pakistani Ministry of Interior's Most Wanted list, Kashmiri was a veteran of the Kashmir jihad who had spent several years in an Indian jail after being arrested from Jammu & Kashmir. While the Pakistan chapter of HUJI is led by Qari Saifullah Akhtar, its Azad Kashmir chapter, which is autonomous, was headed by Ilyas Kashmiri. He was arrested by the Pakistani authorities after the December 2003 twin suicide attacks on General Musharraf's presidential cavalcade in Rawalpindi, but released in February 2004 due to lack of evidence. However, according to the Pakistani militant circles, Kashmiri was released upon the intervention of the United Jihad Council (UJC), a conglomerate of Pakistan-based pro-Kashmir militant organisations, led by Commander Syed Salahuddin.

After being released, Kashmiri switched from the freedom struggle in Jammu Kashmir to the Taliban-led resistance against the NATO forces in Afghanistan and shifted his base to the Waziristan region to join hands with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) led by Commander Baitullah

Mehsud. He had later established a training camp in the Razmak area of Waziristan and shifted most of his militants from his Kotli training camp in Azad Kashmir. In May 2009, Ilyas Kashmiri was accused of plotting the assassination of the Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, in collusion with al-Qaeda, largely because of the COAS's lead role in the ongoing war against terrorism. General Ashfaq Kayani's daily visits to a gymnasium were reportedly tracked by an al-Qaeda cell in Pakistan, and it was decided that he would be targeted by a suicide bomber as soon as he would step out of his car. However, the plan could not be materialized after being leaked out to the intelligence agencies.

Hardly two few weeks before Ilyas was accused of conspiring to target Kayani, he was named in a charge sheet filed by the Islamabad police in the November 2008 gruesome murder of Major General (ret'd) Amir Faisal Alvi, the former General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Pakistan Army's Special Services Group (SSG). The 12-page charge sheet submitted in an anti-terrorism court on May 12, 2009 had stated that the former SSG commanding officer was killed to avenge the role he had played in the fight against Taliban linked militants in the tribal areas of Pakistan. The charge-sheet prepared by the Koral police station said three people involved in the

assassination and already arrested included Major (retd) Haroon Ashiq, a resident of Azad Kashmir; Mohammad Nawaz Khan of Peshawar and Ashfaq Ahmed of Okara. According to the charge, Alvi's murder was carried out on the instructions of Ilyas Kashmiri who had also provided funds and weapons.

The charge sheet pointed out that Ilyas Kashmiri had already been named by the intelligence agencies for involvement in the October 2008 kidnapping for ransom of Satish Anand, a Karachi-based renowned film producer and distributor and the uncle of Juhi Chawla, a well known Bollywood actress. After Satish Anand was finally recovered in April 2009 and the kidnappers arrested, it transpired during subsequent interrogations that one of them, Major (retd) Haroon Ashiq alias Abu Khattab, was a former officer of the Pakistan Army and involved in the November 19, 2008 murder of Amir Faisal Alvi. According to the murder charge sheet, on the day of the assassination, the three accused – Haroon, Ashfaq and Nawaz - followed General Alvi when he left his residence in Bharia Town in Rawalpindi for his private office in Islamabad and killed him along with his driver near the PWD Colony.

The retired army officer's disclosures about the links and the activities of Ilyas Kashmiri sent a chill

of fear down the spine of his interrogators. Haroon Ashiq, 44, was commissioned in the Pakistan Army in 1987 in the 76 PMA Long Course. However, he sought premature retirement as a major in 2001. Hailing from Panjeri in district Bhimbar, Major Haroon was a resident of the Taj Bagh locality in Harbanspura, Lahore. According to his interrogators, in 2000 Haroon, then an army officer, along with his younger brother (Captain Khurram, also an army officer), met Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, the chief operational commander of the Lashkar-e-Toiba and eventually joined the militant group after getting premature retirement from the army. He used to work as a trainer of the LeT fighters. However, he had to leave the LeT in December 2003 after having developed differences with commander Lakhvi.

Major (ret'd) Haroon further told his interrogators that his younger brother Capt Khurram, who served in the elite Special Services Group, also left the army in 2003 to join the LeT. However, he also quit the LeT and joined him. In December 2006, Haroon and his brother went to Wana where they met Taliban commander Mullah Nazir. They later traveled to Miramshah in Waziristan, met Commander Ilyas Kashmiri and finally joined hands with him. In 2007, Haroon's brother Khurram went to Afghanistan's Helmand province to fight against the NATO forces

and eventually lost his life in March 2007 while fighting alongside the Taliban.

According to Major (ret'd) Haroon, he was told by Ilyas Kashmiri in early 2008 that the militant cadres were facing financial problems and were in dire need of funds. In a bid to ease out financial problems, Kashmiri tasked him to raise funds by kidnapping affluent people living in urban areas to claim ransom money. And Satish Anand subsequently became the first influential person to be abducted from Karachi. Major (ret'd) Haroon's interrogators say Commander Kashmiri also ordered the execution of Major General Amir Faisal Alvi, for the lead role he had played during the Angor Adda operation against the Taliban militants in 2004. Ilyas Kashmiri had reportedly paid Rs125, 000 to Haroon Ashiq for killing Major General Alvi.

The Pakistani authorities say the militants belonging to Ilyas Kashmiri's HUI and Commander Baitullah Mehsud's TTP had jointly carried out several major terrorist operations in different parts of Pakistan besides sponsoring the multi-pronged suicide attack against government and security installations in Khost, the eastern province of Afghanistan, before the Afghan presidential elections. Kashmiri's Harkatul Jihadul Islami, Jaish-e-Mohammed,

Harkatul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and a few other Pakistani militant groups are believed to be operating under the name of Brigade 313 to carry out joint terrorist operations. Brigade 313 has been behind many of the high-profile attacks and bombings inside Pakistan.

How an ex-Army commando became a terrorist



Sunday, September 20, 2009

By Hamid Mir

ISLAMABAD: Once he was a blue-eyed boy of President General Pervez Musharraf. He got a cash award from the president for slitting the throat of an Indian Army officer in the year 2000 but after 9/11, he became a suspected terrorist.

This terrorist was Ilyas Kashmiri, reportedly killed in a US drone attack in North Waziristan last week. US officials claimed that Ilyas Kashmiri was a senior al-Qaeda commander and his death was a

huge loss for the militants fighting against the foreign forces in Afghanistan.

Very few people know that Ilyas Kashmiri was a former SSG commando of Pakistan Army. He was originally from Kotli area of Azad Kashmir. He was deputed by Pakistan Army to train the Afghan Mujahideen fighting against the Russian Army in mid-80s. He was an expert of mines supplied to Afghan Mujahideen by the US. He lost one eye during the Jihad against Russian invaders and later on he joined Harkat-e-Jihad-e-Islami of Maulvi Nabi Muhammadi.

Ilyas Kashmiri was based in Miramshah area of North Waziristan where he was working as an instructor at a training camp. After the withdrawal of Russian Army from Afghanistan, Ilyas Kashmiri was asked by Pakistani establishment to work with Kashmiri militants. He joined the Kashmir chapter of Harkatul Jihad-i-Islami in 1991. After a few years, he developed some differences with the head of HuJI Qari Saifullah Akhtar.

Ilyas Kashmiri created his own 313 Brigade in HuJI. He was once arrested by Indian Army from Poonch area of Indian held Kashmir along with Nasrullah Mansoor Langrial. He was imprisoned in

different Indian jails for two years and finally he escaped from there after breaking the jail. His old friend Langrial is still imprisoned in India.

Ilyas Kashmiri became a legend after escaping from the Indian jail. It was 1998 when the Indian Army started incursions along the Line of Control and killed Pakistani civilians many times by crossing the border. Ilyas Kashmiri was given the task to attack the Indians from their back. He did it many times.

Indian Army killed 14 civilians on February 25, 2000 in Lonjot village of Nakial in Azad Kashmir. Indian commandos crossed the LoC, spent the whole night in a Pakistani village and left early morning. They slit the throats of three girls and took away their heads with them. They also kidnapped two local girls. The next morning, the heads of the kidnapped girls were thrown towards Pakistani soldiers by the Indian Army.

The very next day of this massacre, Ilyas Kashmiri conducted a guerilla operation against the Indian Army in Nakyal sector on the morning of February 26, 2000. He crossed the LoC with 25 fighters of the 313 Brigade. He surrounded a bunker of Indian Army and threw grenades inside. After one of his

fighters Quadratullah lost his life, he was able to kidnap an injured officer of the Indian Army. That was not the end. He slit the throat of the kidnapped officer.

He came back to Pakistan with the head of the dead Indian Army officer in his bag and presented this head to top Army officials and later on to the then Army Chief General Pervez Musharraf, who gave him a cash award of rupees one lakh.

The pictures of Ilyas Kashmiri with the head of a dead Indian Army officer in his hands were published in some Pakistani newspapers and he became very important among the Kashmiri militants. Maulana Zahoor Ahmad Alvi of Jamia Muhammadiyah, Islamabad, issued a fatwa in support of slitting the throats of Indian Army officers. Those were the days when Corps Commander, Rawalpindi, Lt Gen Mehmood Ahmad, visited the training camp of Ilyas Kashmiri in Kotli and appreciated his frequent guerilla actions against the Indian Army.

His honeymoon with the Pakistan Army generals was over after the creation of Jaish-e-Muhammad. Gen Mehmood wanted Ilyas Kashmiri to join JeM and accept Maulana Masood Azhar as his leader

but the one eyed militant refused to do so. The militants of JeM once attacked the training camp of Ilyas Kashmiri in Kotli but he survived that attack. His outfit was banned by Musharraf after 9/11. He was arrested after an attack on the life of Pervez Musharraf in December 2003. He was tortured during the interrogation.

The United Jihad Council led by Syed Salahuddin strongly protested the arrest of Ilyas Kashmiri and on the pressure of Kashmiri militants, Ilyas Kashmiri was released in February 2004. He was a shattered man after his release. He disassociated himself from the Kashmiri militants and remained silent for at least three years.

It was the Lal Masjid operation in July 2007, which totally changed Ilyas Kashmiri. He moved to North Waziristan where he spent many years as a Jihad instructor. This area was full of his friends and sympathisers. He reorganized his 313 Brigade and joined hands with the Taliban but he was never close to al-Qaeda leadership. He attracted many former Pakistan Army officers to join hands with him. The strength of 313 Brigade in North Waziristan was more than 3,000. Most of his fighters were hired from the Punjab, Sindh and Azad Kashmir.

It is alleged that he organised many terrorist attacks in different areas of Pakistan, including the assassination of Major General (retd) Faisal Alvi in Rawalpindi. Alvi was also from the SSG and he led the first-ever Army operation in North Waziristan in 2004.

Kashmiri planned attacks on Alvi on the demand of Taliban in North Waziristan. Sources close to his family have yet not confirmed his death in a US drone attack but there is no doubt that Ilyas Kashmiri was actually a creation of the Pakistani establishment like Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi of the banned LeT.

The Pakistani establishment abandoned and arrested most of these militant leaders without realising that they had followers all over Pakistan and they could create problems for Pakistan anytime. The establishment is still without any policy about all those who were once declared “freedom fighters” and were honored by the top Army officials like Pervez Musharraf.

Who is Ilyas Kashmiri?

Friday, October 02, 2009

This is with reference to Hamid Mir's report (Sept 20) titled "How an ex-commando became a terrorist". It is total disinformation -- Ilyas Kashmiri neither had any association with the SSG nor did he serve in the army as a soldier. Being an ex-commando officer, I know that the SSG never indulges in such heinous crimes. It's a superior professional force of the army composed of responsible officers and men who carry out professional tasks. I would like to add that there is always an attempt by hostile agencies to defame the security forces of Pakistan with a malicious intent. Therefore, newspapers and columnists must refrain from falling prey to these fifth columnists.

Colonel (r) Imam

Ex-SSG officer,

Rawalpindi

Why Would the Pentagon Worry About Improved Success of Predator Airstrikes in Pakistan?

October 01, 2009 1:36 PM

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Obama administration officials have been proud of the fact that largely because of better intelligence, unmanned Predator drone strikes against Taliban and al Qaeda forces in Pakistan have been more successful in the first eight months of President Obama's presidency than in the previous two years combined.

Sources say this success is largely because of better intelligence, stemming from greater cooperation by the Pakistani government and a stronger U.S. counter-insurgency program on the other side of the border in Afghanistan.

That added pressure creates the conditions for better intelligence on the ground as to where Taliban and al Qaeda forces are, sources say.

“They’re squeezed,” a Pentagon source says of individuals on the border region. “And when people are squeezed, they talk.”

But military officials who support Gen. Stanley McChrystal’s proposal for a larger counter-insurgency strategy in Afghanistan are concerned that some in the White House interpret this success as a reason to focus entirely on counterterrorism using drones.

Skeptics of the McChrystal plan in the White House, including Vice President Biden (and even President Obama, to a degree), are considering a shift in focus to counter-terrorism -- less nation-building in Afghanistan and concern for protecting Afghans, more targeting of al Qaeda and allies in the Taliban. Military sources worry that the success of the predator strikes will be seen as “happening in a vacuum,” with insufficient credit given to the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan.

An unofficial analysis of U.S. airstrikes in Pakistan through September 2009 by [the reputable website LongWarJournal](#), based on the publicly available data, indicates that 404 Taliban/al Qaeda were killed by Predator strikes in 2009, with 43 civilians killed.

In 2008, Predators killed 286 Taliban/al A Qaeda, with 31 civilian killed. In 2007, 73 Taliban/al Qaeda were killed.

The Pentagon would not comment on the study. Bill Roggio, editor of The Long War Journal, says the information comes from press reports including local Pakistani newspapers -- Dawn, Daily Times, Geo News, as well as wire services such as AFP, Reuters, and AP.

The study noted that “more than one in three of the strikes have killed a High Value Target (HVT). An overwhelming number of strikes -- nearly 90 percent -- have taken place against al Qaeda and Taliban targets in North and South Waziristan. Notably, a large percentage of the high value targets killed were killed in a tribal region operated by a Taliban leader whom the Pakistani military and government considers an ally.”

As the number of strikes has markedly increased, the average casualty rate has increased as well -- from 10.64 killed per strike, compared to 8.81 in 2008.

Eight high-value targets were killed in 2008:

Abdullah Azzam al Saudi, Abu Zubair al Masri, Abu Jihad al Masri, Khalid Habib, Abu Haris, Abu Khabab al Masri, Abu Sulayman Jazairi, and Abu Laith al Libi.

So far in 2009, six high value targets have been killed: Ilyas Kashmiri, Najmuddin Jalolov, Mustafa al

Jaziri, Baitullah Mehsud, Osama al Kini, and Sheikh Ahmed Salim Swedan.

-- jpt

Dead sepoy's village doesn't know his killer is killed in Pakistan

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In about a month's time, after the elections are over in Maharashtra, a memorial to Sepoy Bhausaheb Talekar of the 17 Maratha Light Infantry will be

inaugurated at his parents' village in Kolgaon, in the Srigonda taluka of Ahmednagar district.

Talekar was killed brutally on the Line of Control by HuJI commander Ilyas Kashmiri, who is said to have presented the Indian soldier's head to General Pervez Musharraf and received a reward of Rs 1 lakh for it.

Kashmiri — who according to some reports was also a Pakistan Special Services Group commando — was killed in an American drone attack earlier this month.

Despite being home to around 400 serving and nearly 350 retired Army personnel, not many in Kolgaon know of Kashmiri's death. Everyone remembers the day Talekar's body was brought here, though.

“He was covered in the Indian flag. We were told his face was mutilated, some limbs were missing, that the body was not in a condition to be unveiled,” says Meena, Talekar's sister.

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Meena had wanted to see her brother's face once before he was cremated. The Army declined, and the Talekars accepted the decision unquestioningly.

Villagers say the family did not know the 24-year-old had been beheaded.

To some in Kolgaon, Kashmiri's death makes up — to a very small extent — for the terrible death of Talekar. “It is some sort of revenge,” says Sarpanch Hemantrao Nalgi. “We had read reports about Musharraf rewarding a terrorist for an Indian soldier's death. We did not know it was for Bhausheb.”

Told of Kashmiri's death, Sitabai, Talekar's mother, merely says, “After nine years...”, her voice trailing off.

In Meena's voice there is anger: “Each time we hear of terrorism, or Pakistan, we are filled with anger.” Following Talekar's death, his family received nearly Rs 12 lakh as compensation over several years. A pension of Rs 10,000 comes in every month, and Sitabai and her husband were able to stop working as daily-wage labourers soon after their son's death. The Army took care of Meena's education; she now has a post-graduate degree. Some of the compensation money was spent on her wedding. The village has replaced the thatched hut of Talekar's growing-up years with a proper house for the family. Talekar studied till Class 10. The six acres of rain-fed land the family owned was yielding little at that time. Sitabai would get 50 paise for a full day's labour — an income that later rose to Rs 6, then Rs 10, per day.

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“I told him not to join the Army, but he said there was no option. No other job was available. It is like that for many people here. Later, he would tell me, ‘people die in accidents, of other reasons, at least in the Army there is some glory’,” says Sitabai.

“He was our only son.”

Meena says her brother’s death led to an improvement in the family’s economic situation, but it was a change they would have rather done without.

“We got all that money, but at what price? It will not bring back my brother.”

... contd.

The family is now looking forward to the upcoming memorial. “We also hope to build a school for special children in my brother’s name. Bhausahab was very keen that people with special needs have a separate school so that they get equal opportunities in life,” says Meena.

Soon after Kargil war, the local MP gave Rs 5 lakh to build a cultural centre in the name of Kolgaon’s two martyrs, Talekar and Sepoy Sachin Sake of the Rashtriya Rifles (who won the Sena medal). The villagers put together the rest of the money, and the centre was recently completed. The village now uses

the Rs 12 lakh building for social events like weddings.

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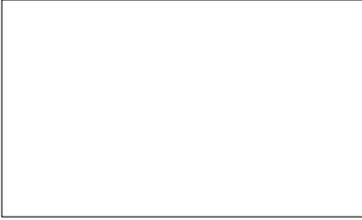
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